The Roupell Mystery

By Austyn Granville

CHAPTER VIII.—(Continued.)

"I'm afraid, doctor, you would not make a very good detective. Recollect that in nine cases out of ten, the obvious reason is always the wrong one. A smart villain, who knows enough to carry glass stilettos, and how to use them skillfully, would not have unnecessarily alarmed the household by firing a pistol in the dead of night. Oh, no! he would simply have smothered the woman, already insensible and unresisting, with a pillow, or choked her to death."

"I see, I see," acquiesced the physician. "Go on."

"Let us assume, now, that this unknown person entered the house through the window in Monsieur Van Lith's chamber. While creeping through the room he espies a case of pistols. He has come unarmed, save with the Venetian stiletto. But once in the house, his courage fails him. He picks up a pistol from the case, saying, 'This will protect me if I have to proceed to extremities.' He passes on to Madame Roupell's chamber, and falls to searching among her papers. She is a woman of large property, and must have valuables. He is not after money, for the diamonds which she wore to the opera have not been taken. While thus engaged, he is interrupted by Madame Roupell, who rushed forward to save her papers. He jumps from his chair, overturning it, and raises the stiletto; she turns and flees; he pursued and stabs her. Do you understand, monsieur?"

"Yes, I understand everything, except his firing the pistol into the head of a woman whom he had apparently already put out of the way of harming him. I am assuming, of course, that his object was not murder. Of course, Madame Roupell may have recognized him, and he may have wanted to be sure she was dead."

"Even that would not have warranted his risking firing the pistol. Recollect, as I have already said, he could easily have smothered her without making any noise," replied Cassagne.

"True! Then why did he fire the pistol?"

"It is easy to conjecture," returned the Frenchman. "He did it to direct suspicion from himself to the owner of the weapon."

"The diabolical villain!" exclaimed the doctor, and apparently so impressed was he with M. Cassagne's theory that he kept repeating the phrase over and over again, "The diabolical villain!"

But M. Cassagne paid no heed to the ejaculations of the physician. He was down upon his knees, running about on all fours on the carpet, totally regardless of the injury to his pantaloons. His nose was within an inch of the floor. At last he stopped in the middle of the apartment, and exclaimed:

"Give me the knife."

The doctor handed it to him. He at once proceeded to cut away the carpet, and then to dig furiously into the wooden flooring.

"What on earth are you looking for?" inquired Mason.

"Never mind," replied Cassagne. "Wait a moment, and you'll see."

He kept on digging away with the knife as furiously as ever. At last he stopped, and, still on his knees, held triumphantly aloft a small, oblong, black object. Then he exclaimed breathlessly:

"All right; I have got the bullet."

"If we only had Van Lith's pistol here," said Mason, "the evidence would be complete, but it is in Paris."

The detective arose and smoothed out the knees of his pantaloons, which he had sadly crumpled.

"We have got what is quite as good," he said. "Go into the next room and bring me the other pistol. Ten to one they were mates."

Taking the pistol from the doctor's hands, he pushed the bullet into the muzzle. It fitted to a nicety.

"We have thus far," said M. Cassagne, "established our theory successfully in regard to one very important point. Neither your friend Van Lith nor Monsieur Chabot had a hand in this murder. It was committed by a third party—someone who entered the house unknown to anyone, and who left it in an equally secret manner. Let us see, now, how he got away, and what means of escape presented themselves. He could not have made his exit by any of the doors, because one of them led to the room in which Van Lith was hiding, and another opened directly into the chamber occupied by Monsieur Chabot. There is still, of course, a bare chance that he retired by the door leading into the corridor; but it is altogether improbable that he would take such a risk, as that corridor was thronged with people hurrying to Madame Roupell's chamber at the sound of the shot."

"That is so," acquiesced Mason. "Had he attempted to escape into the corridor he would undoubtedly have been seen and captured."

"He must, therefore," continued Cassagne, "have gotten out of the windows. The man I have in my mind's eye at the present moment would have been smart enough to raise the window before he fired the shot. He would be particularly careful not to leave any clew that he had been in the chamber, for that would exonerate the owner of the pistol. He would certainly not have leaped from the window, because that would have left footprints on the ground; you will look in vain for such. Yet he did get out of this very window."

"How can you tell that?" asked Mason, in amazement. "It has been already inspected by the prefect of police. He has also searched carefully under the window, for I saw him doing it. If anyone had passed through that opening he would surely have discovered it."

"The prefect is doubtless a good officer," replied Cassagne, "but if he had looked closer, he would have seen that in climbing through the window the man brushed the dust off this geranium leaf with his coat."

The doctor bent down and placed the leaf indicated alongside one that had not been touched. The truth of the detective's discovery became then convincing. One was covered with dust, the other had been swept partly clean. M. Cassagne smiled with pardonable pride, and, saying that he had for the present nothing further to examine in the bed chambers, led the way down stairs, first of all, however, replacing, carefully, the seals which he had removed.

Taking his hat from the rack in the hall, and inviting Dr. Mason to accompany him, he passed quickly around to the rear of the chateau. A man servant was shaking some carpets on the back lawn. He ordered him to bring a ladder, and, placing it against the wall of the chateau, ascended it nimbly.

"I thought so," he called down to the doctor. "The ladder will bear two of us. Come up, please."

"What is it this time?" inquired Mason, craning his neck so as to be on a level with the window sill.

Cassagne directed the physician's attention to a slight abrasion of the stone.

"That was caused by the man's shoe when he leaped from the sill," he explained.

"But where did he leap to?" inquired the doctor. "This window is twenty feet from the ground, at least. Even if he had been in his stocking feet he must have left some impression, and you say he had shoes on."

"He reached the ground another way, that is all," replied Cassagne. "Most likely he jumped into that tree. Let's see if it is possible."

With the agility of a sailor ascending the rigging of a vessel, he climbed up the rest of the ladder, and stepped on to the window sill. After measuring the distance with his eye for a few moments he said:

"It was a desperate leap for a man to take in the night time; but recollect, he was a desperate fellow."

Then gathering himself together, and exerting his enormous muscular strength, he sprang from the window. A projecting bough nearly a dozen feet away was his objective point. He caught it, and with the agility of a trapezist passed hand over hand down to the trunk. As he swung himself around the branch, his eye fell upon a small, glittering object stuck fast in the fork of the tree. He picked it up, and slid rapidly down to the ground, where the doctor was awaiting him. Placing in the physician's hand a small gold locket, the detective exclaimed in a delighted voice:

"I'll have him—I'll find him now, if I have to hunt for him all over France."

Just then one of the servants approached. "It was twelve o'clock. Would the gentlemen like breakfast?"

"The gentlemen will have some breakfast by all means," replied M. Cassagne. "Our labor has been immense, our reward ought to be proportionate," and the physician led the way, and together they passed into the chateau.

CHAPTER IX.

Hardly had M. Alfred Cassagne swallowed the last mouthful of his breakfast, than his active mind reverted again to the mystery which yet surrounded the death of Mme. Roupell.

Who was the man, at present unknown, who had crept like a thief in the night into the chateau, and as quietly stolen away when his foul work had been accomplished? And what was his motive in committing the crime? Was he in any way connected with M. Chabot? Could it be possible that the prefect of police had stumbled on the real instigator of the murder in the person of Chabot, and that this unknown person was his confederate? Most likely at that moment, some officer from the prefecture was engaged in closely watching Chabot's slightest movements. There might be something in the prefect's theory, after all. Mature reflection convinced M. Cassagne that it would not do to dismiss it with a mere shrug of the shoulders. Chabot's accomplice might be the man they were looking for. Anyhow, it would not do to leave the point uncovered.

"I must write at once," he said, presently, "to Cliquot. Cliquot is my assistant. We must have him keep watch of this Monsieur Chabot's movements."

M. Cassagne wrote out a series of instructions, particularly cautioning his assistant to keep track of M. Chabot, and under no circumstances, if he ran across any of the people from the prefecture, to let them really know who he was. Then he appeared to be engrossed in thought. He rubbed his hands violently together, as if he would impart activity to his brain by the friction. He arose, thrust back his chair, and began to walk rapidly up and down the room, stopping occasionally to examine the pictures on the walls, with the eye of a critic.

"Madame's husband left her very well off, I should judge," he remarked at last.

"Very," replied Dr. Mason.

"How long ago did Monsieur Roupell die?"

"About fifteen years."

"And then she took up with the nieces?"

"Not immediately. It was not until the death of their parents that Madame Roupell went to America to fetch them."

"Tell me what relatives Madame Roupell had besides these young ladies."

"There were no other relatives except a brother, a dissolute character, who followed his sister from America to this country."

"And his name?"

"As I recollect it, Henry Graham, I believe. A man of fifty or sixty."

"When did you last see this Henry Graham?"

"I never saw him but once. He came to the chateau, on some begging expedition when I happened to be here. He pretended to be very affectionate. He was a poor looking creature, quite broken down when I saw him, and not at all the kind of man to commit a daring crime."

"Recollect that the moment Madame Roupell died he had an interest in her estate. He was her nearest heir-at-law."

"But she had made her will, she had disowned him, and utterly cast him off. That will bequeathed all her property to her nieces. I witnessed it. I knew what was in it."

M. Cassagne began to grow more and more interested. He no longer cast his eyes upon the walls and ceiling. But he looked the doctor straight in the face.

"On what was that will written? Try your utmost now to recollect that; a great deal depends on it."

"The first will was not written upon paper. The second contained some slight bequests to friends and to favorite servants. I believe I was mentioned myself for some trifling amount. In other respects the two wills were identical. The first one was drawn up by Madame Roupell's lawyers. She kept the second will at her banker's. The first one remained in the house. It was engrossed on parchment."

"On parchment," repeated M. Cassagne. "Was it anything like this?" and he handed a scrap of the article in question over to the doctor.

"Where did you find this?" inquired the doctor when he could sufficiently recover from his astonishment to speak.

"I found it upstairs," replied M. Cassagne. "I put it in my pocket, because it was in a queer place for a scrap of parchment. I found it with four other pieces, in the fireplace of Madame Roupell's bedroom. Of course, I have a theory, now, how they came there. First of all, however, before I come to that, tell me if you are certain that the scraps were torn from Madame Roupell's will—the first will, I mean—the parchment one?"

The physician did not immediately reply. He fully realized the importance of his answer, and how much hung on it. "Give me the scraps," he said. "If there is any writing on them I should be able to tell by that. It was a very peculiar hand. It looked as if it had been engrossed by an English scrivener. Yes, the handwritings are identical."

"It is enough," muttered Cassagne, sweeping the pieces of parchment up from the table and putting them carefully away in his pocketbook. "Now for my theory. Henry Graham is the man we want to find. Mind you, I don't say he committed the murder, but you'll see he is implicated in it in some way or other. He had everything to gain by Madame Roupell's death, provided she died intestate. He must have learned in some way that his sister had made a will disinheriting him. To gain possession of what he thought was the only will was his object. If he could do that, his sister, being ignornant of the fact that the will was destroyed, would go to her grave believing herself testate. On her death her brother could have come forward and claimed the property."

It was clever reasoning. The doctor listened with breathless interest as the detective continued:

"Assuming that it is this Henry Graham, let us see what he knew and what he did. He must have heard of the making of this first will, and somehow or other he must have learned of its contents. He was ignorant of the making of the second instrument. Now let us see how he acted. He gained an entrance to the chateau. How he did this it is impossible to state at present. Probably he may have been in collusion with somebody in the house; but I don't know yet. He was evidently well posted as to the movements of the family, for he chose a time when, as he thought, they had gone to the opera. It was a mere accident—we don't know whether it was or not, but we will assume so—that Miss Harriet Weldon did not accompany the party. I am myself inclined to think there was some love affair between her and Van Lith, which accounts for his presence in the house that night, and which also accounts for his silence. You understand what I mean. He won't speak for fear of compromising the young lady."

The doctor nodded. "That is good," he said, "very good, indeed; go ahead."

"The assassin was a little disconcerted at finding Miss Weldon and your friend in the chateau. Instead of entering the house from the front, which would be comparatively easy, he was compelled to do so by the rear, running the risk of being seen by the servants. He gained Madame Roupell's chamber and proceeded to search for the document. He ransacked the desk and then threw the papers about. Unconsciously he stayed longer than he intended. So absorbed was he in his search that he was surprised by his victim. He drew the stiletto, stabbed her, and quietly resumed his search for the paper. After a time, he found it. He was about to destroy it by fire, when it occurred to him that a parchment would burn better if it was in small pieces. He started to tear it up, when he altered his mind, and instead of burning it then and there, put it in his pocket to be destroyed at some more favorable opportunity. Unluckily for him, in his hurry he did not pick up the scraps he tore off."

(To be continued.)

Why They Blubbered.

"Did you notice that nearly every one in the audience shed tears during my great death scene?" queried the leading lady.

"Yes," answered the soubrette, "and I don't blame them."

"Don't blame them!" echoed the l. l. "Why, what do you mean?"

"They were next to the painful fact that your demise wasn't real," explained the soubrette.

Comparisons.

"Why do so many of our ablest men turn their backs on the public and devote their talents to the service of great corporations?"

"Well," answered Senator Sorghum, "I shouldn't be surprised if it was because a corporation generally stands by a man who has worked for it and the public generally doesn't."—Washington Star.

Strikes Gold Every Week.

American tourist in England, seeing a farm laborer digging a deep drain: "What are you digging here for?" asked the tourist.

"Gold, guv-nor," replied the laborer.

Tourist—When do you expect to strike it?

Laborer—One o'clock on Saturday.

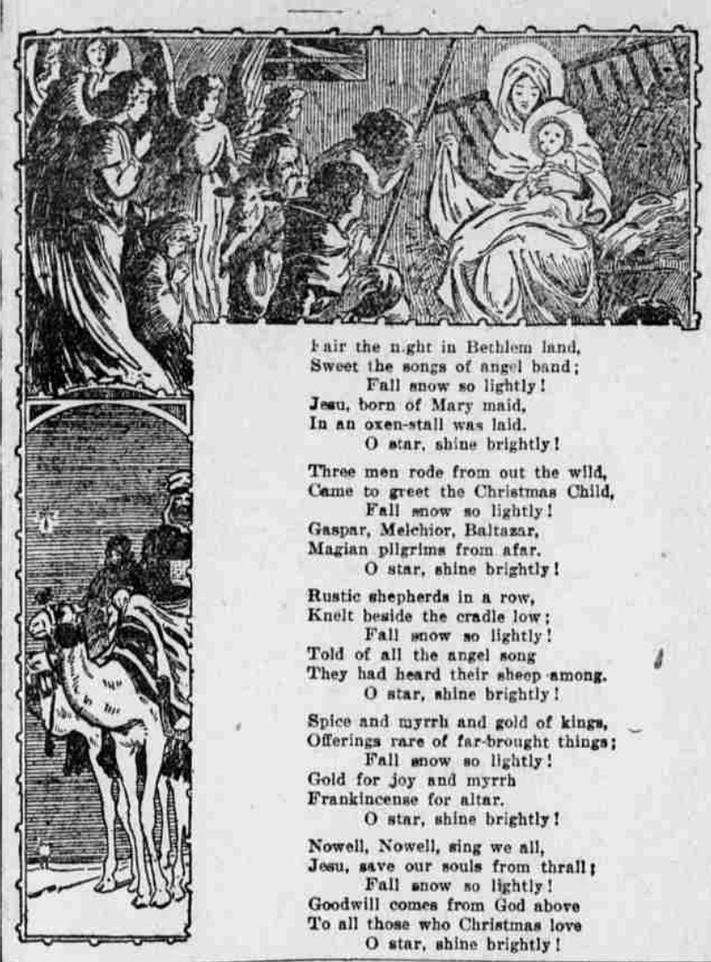
Discouraged.

Lovely Fiancee—Oh, George, I sometimes think I would rather die than be married!

George—What, darling! Rather die?

Lovely Fiancee—Yes, you don't have to rehearse half a dozen times for that, you know.—Chicago Tribune.

BETHLEM LAND.



Fair the night in Bethlem land,
Sweet the songs of angel band;
Fall snow so lightly!
Jesu, born of Mary maid,
In an oxen-stall was laid.
O star, shine brightly!

Three men rode from out the wild,
Came to greet the Christmas Child,
Fall snow so lightly!
Gaspar, Melchior, Baltazar,
Magian pilgrims from afar.
O star, shine brightly!

Rustic shepherds in a row,
Knelt beside the cradle low;
Fall snow so lightly!
Told of all the angel song
They had heard their sheep among.
O star, shine brightly!

Spice and myrrh and gold of kings,
Offerings rare of far-brought things;
Fall snow so lightly!
Gold for joy and myrrh
Frankincense for altar.
O star, shine brightly!

Nowell, Nowell, sing we all,
Jesu, save our souls from thrall;
Fall snow so lightly!
Goodwill comes from God above
To all those who Christmas love
O star, shine brightly!

Sam's Christmas

BY JOHN W. RYAN

It was the night before Christmas, and he was coming home. From the far West he telegraphed that he would come East to see the Yule log blaze and the festival candle burn.

"Let me have some of that potato-cake that Bridget used to make," he put at the end of his dispatch, and the old family servant when this was read to her said:

"Faith, and he ought to have somebody better nor that, the crachture, after being out for a year among those Philippines, who live in the swamps and ait rice six days in the week, besides Sunday."

"So he shall, Bridget," replied the home-mother, Mrs. Thurston. "We'll have a little surprise party for him, and have all his relations and intimate friends within call to welcome him."

"That'll be foine intirely, ma'am, and I'll have to begin me cooking right off, so that there'll be lashins' of everything to ait and drink."

"You can save your strength for the Christmas dinner, Bridget, but for the Christmas-eve gathering we'll have a caterer, and that will save you a great deal of trouble."

"It wouldn't be the laist trouble in the world anything I could do for Master Samuel, but let the caterer bring his ice crames and his sherbits, and his swale-cakes, and I'll give the boy something fit to ait the next day, something substantial that'll make him forget he was ever hungry among thim yaller dwarfs that he wint out to tache."

And now the night had come when his arrival was anxiously expected. The guests had all assembled, and at every passing footstep there was a shout, "There he is," but as the sound passed and died away in the distance, there were little sighs of disappointment from brothers, sisters and cousins, and the company returned to their somewhat forced merriment, hoping that the next ten or fifteen minutes would bring a welcome ring of the door bell. Nine o'clock came, and the expected prodigal son, as some one so jocosely called him, did not appear.

"Oh, these Western trains are always late the night before a holiday," said Uncle Arthur, who had been a great traveler and knew all about the haps and mishaps of railroad management.

"So they are, so they are," echoed Sam's father, who had never been a hundred miles from his native city, and could no more decipher a time-table than he could read hieroglyphics on a pyramid.

And "So they are, so they are," murmured every one else, though the festivities in which they were engaged seemed like the play of "Hamlet" with the Danish prince left out.

Ten o'clock struck and still the absent one had not returned.

"Perhaps he won't come until morning," remarked Mrs. Moulton. "Of course he did not know you would all be here, and he may have stayed over in New York to see some old college chums."

"That wouldn't be a bit like Sam," returned his father. "He's a good deal like me. When he says he'll do a thing, he does it."

"Yes, he's a chip of the old block," whispered one of Sam's sisters, "though father did promise to mail a letter for me last month, and kept it in his pocket for a week."

"Well," asked Sam's younger brother Tom, "why can't we begin on the eatables? The ice cream has been dished up this half hour, and it will be only fit to drink if we wait much longer."

"I never saw such a hungry boy in my life," said Aunt Priscilla from the country. "When he comes up to the farm he keeps me baking all the time. I call him the great American pie-eater."

"Yes, he's one of the kind you'd rather board for a week than a fortnight," said Mr. Thurston.

"Oh, I don't begrudge him what he puts into his stomach, but if he doesn't end up by becoming a confirmed dyspeptic, my name is not Priscilla."

"All right, Aunty," answered Tom. "'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' Just take my arm and I'll show you how a fashionable caterer spreads a feast at so much a plate. I'm not allowed to give the price, but it's enormous, like my appetite."

There was a general movement toward the dining-room at this, as the hostess and Uncle Arthur led the way, and soon the edibles began to disappear before the attacks of the guests whose hunger had been sharpened by delay.

Eleven o'clock rang out from a neighboring steeple and still no Sam.

"Too bad, too bad," murmured Grandmother White, who had sat up long past her usual hour for retiring. "I knew something disagreeable was going to happen. I dreamed that I lost a tooth last night, and that always means misfortune."

"I didn't know she had one to lose," remarked Tom behind his napkin. "I thought all her masticators were boughten on a plate."

And the old lady, oblivious of the fact that her personal belongings were being criticized, went on to relate how a dream of hers had once come true, and got her hearers into such a melancholy condition that they neglected the good things spread before them, when suddenly to counteract the prevailing gloom, Dick Chester exclaimed: "Here's to the health of my old schoolmate, Sam Thurston," and followed up the toast by starting the chorus, "For he's a jolly good fellow." This was in full blast when a cry outside hushed the song into silence. It was piercing, insistent, often repeated, and bore this message:

"Extra Evening Mercury, train wrecked on the T. and W. road; all the passengers believed to have been killed." The people around the board sat with blanched faces. No one dared speak until Mrs. Thurston sobbed: "That's the train my poor boy was on."

The father said nothing. He put on his hat and went out into the night, he knew not where. He only felt that he must do something, bring some light out of the darkness, some hope out of despair. Tom followed him, for men must act while women weep.

And the girls gathered around the stricken mother, and one of them crept closer than all others and said:

"It is not true, it is not true!"

But still the cry of disaster, now growing fainter and fainter, was heard along the frozen streets, and even the late revellers from the closed saloons hushed their noisy ribaldry as the message of death was borne upon the air to their dulled and bewildered senses, and one cried:

"Shut up, fellows! It may be our turn next, so let us respect the poor chaps that are gone. They may have been better men than we with people to love and care for."

Then with uncertain steps they went on silent as the tomb to the poor den in some cheap lodging-house that they called home.

Within the house there were tears where there should have been laughter, and the poor words of comfort and sympathy, though well meant, seemed commonplace in the face of a great sorrow.

Twelve shocks of sound came dismally across the square, yet no one in that little group wished another a "Merry Christmas."

Up the plank-walk of the yard at the last stroke there was a sound of heavy footsteps crunching the snow, and then a pull at the bell. All this was ominous in the stillness of this early morning, and each one hesitated to answer the summons, until, at last, the girl who was nearest to the weeping mother arose to meet whatever evil was to come.

The door swung back and then a joyous voice cried:

"Why, Faith, are you here?"

"And is it really you, Sam?" came in answer, as two young figures were locked in a long embrace.

"Oh, stop that nonsense," shouted Tom, gleefully, who was behind with his father. "Let somebody else have a chance to welcome the returning hero. Here's mother."

And then Sam had his arms around the little woman who had given him birth, and Mr. Thurston exclaimed:

"That's right, my boy. You can have lots of girls, but only one mother."

Then some one said "Merry Christmas," and the shout went from one to another as they thought of the God-man who had raised the widow's son from the dead.

"It seems like a miracle," said the grandmother, when she came in for her share of the unexpected greeting.

"Oh, there is nothing miraculous about my being here now," said Sam. "I missed the train on the 'T. and W.,' and had to take one two hours later on the 'X. and Y.'"

"Well, Providence was watching over my boy, anyway," said the mother, as Faith sat down at the piano and began a Christmas carol with the words: "Unto thee a child is born."

New Year's Eve, 11:55 P. M.

He rose to go. 'Twas New Year's eve.
"One kiss," he begged, "my dear."
She coyly said, "You cannot have
Another kiss THIS year."

Trees on the Tables.

For the royal family in Germany Christmas trees are placed upon tables of different heights. That for the Emperor is the highest, the Empress' table is next in size, and the smallest is for the baby of the family. Carp is served for the imperial dinner, a traditional dish for the Christmas feast throughout Germany.

Friendly Advice.

"Can you suggest something for me to get for my wife for Christmas?" he asked of the shopkeeper.

"You'd better get her a box of cigars, I expect," said the shopkeeper. "She was in here this morning and bought a lace parasol for you."—Baltimore American.

CHRISTMAS ARMY EN ROUTE TO STOCKINGVILLE.